

is a postgraduate research and study centre which houses major manuscripts and books on Coptic culture, language, history, art and music.

The Holy Synod of the Coptic Church comprises 82 Metropolitans and Bishops, headed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. The Coptic Church is an active member of the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Council of Churches. It was the founding member of the Middle East Council of Churches in 1974.

As the head of the oldest church in Africa, Pope Shenouda has been very keen to extend the Apostolic mission of St Mark across all Africa. In June 1976, His Holiness ordained Bishop Antonious Markos to commence missionary work among the African tribes in Kenya. Today there are 33 Coptic Churches, two monasteries and a vocational center in Kenya, and churches in Zimbabwe, Zaire, Namibia and South Africa.

Outside of Egypt, there are 80 churches in the United States, two theological colleges and St Anthony's Monastery in California. In Canada there are 22 churches and 3 schools. In Europe, there are 57 churches across 16 countries including St Anthony's Monastery in Frankfurt, St Shenute's Monastery in Milan and a retreat center in Birmingham and Stevenage.

the Holy Bible on the one hand and on the tradition of the early universal Church on the other, ie. In the way the teachings of our Lord and Apostles were understood and practised. The Coptic Church most conscientiously abides by the teachings of the Scriptures, the Creed in accordance with the decisions of the first three ecumenical councils, as well as the tradition of the early Church in each concern. No wonder the eminent Catholic historian, A. Fortesque, wrote, "Perhaps nowhere in the world, can you imagine yourself back in so remote an age as when you are in a Coptic Church"

The following are the seven basic tenants of the Coptic Church doctrine and practice:

- i) The Holy Bible; ii) The Sacraments; iii) Prayer; iv) Saint Mary

The Feasts and the fasts

- **Fasts**
 - Pre-Lent fast of Nineveh, the great fast of Lent, the fast of the Nativity before Christmas, The fast of the Apostles after the Ascension, the fast of the Virgin. In addition Wednesday's and Friday's except between Easter and Pentecost.
 - **Feasts**
 - **7 Major Feasts**
 - Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, Annunciation.
 - **7 Minor Feasts**
 - Circumcision of our Lord, Entrance into the Temple, Entrance into Egypt, Wedding of Cana, Transfiguration, Holy Thursday, Thomas Sunday.

DOCTRINES AND RITES

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The doctrines of the Coptic Orthodox Church rest on



The Coptic Orthodox Church



The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Apostolic churches in the world. The Copts are the native Christians of Egypt and the direct descendants of ancient Egyptians, the Pharaohs. They are the surviving indigenous Egyptians, a people with the longest recorded history. The term "COPT" is derived from the Greek word "Agyptos" meaning "Egyptian".

Christianity in Egypt

"*There will be a alter to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt*" (*Isaiah 19:19*)

Egypt received a special blessing when the Lord Jesus Christ spent His early childhood there, traveling from Sinai in the east to the valley of Nitria in the west and southwards to Assuit, the heart of Egypt (*Matthew 2:15*).

St Mark the Evangelist and Apostle, an African in origin, established the Coptic Orthodox Church in AD 42 in Alexandria, Egypt and became Her first Patriarch. Before his martyrdom in Alexandria in AD68, St Mark had ordained a bishop by the name of Anianus, several priests and deacons. By the end of the second century, Christianity had spread throughout Egypt.

The Copts suffered the fiercest persecutions in all the Christian world, the worst being experienced during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian. The Copts considered the first year of his reign, AD 284, as the beginning of a new era in the old Egyptian calendar, which they called Anno Matrii (AM).

The Contribution of the Coptic Church to Christianity

Abba John Cassian who introduced monasticism in France.

D. Missionary

The School of Alexandria sent missionaries who carried Christianity to pagan tribes in Libya, Phrygia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Sinai, Arabia and the Thebaid. Christianity was first introduced through commercial and maritime relations.

In Europe, Athanasius established a church in Belgium during his exile. In Helvetia (Switzerland) the Theban legion watered the land with the blood of their martyrdom when they refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Their leader, Maurice was honoured by the naming of a city after his name, St Moritz. In Ireland, seven Coptic monks were among the pioneers of the faith and left many traces upon the art and life of the people; three manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin confirm this.

The Coptic Orthodox Church Today

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A. Academic

St Mark established the Catechetical School of Alexandria where all branches of learning flourished. The school soon became a centre for intensive study and a stronghold of faith until it won the battle against the non-Christian philosophers who had held undisputed sway until that time. The school fostered such giants of theological learning as Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215), the Apostolic Athanasius (259-373), St Cyril of Alexandria (376-444), as well as Origin, Didymus the blind and Abba Dioscorus.

B. Doctrinal

The Ecumenical Council of Nicea in AD 325 saw the young Alexandrian Archdeacon Athanasius defend the divinity of Christ and posit the Creed. This Council assigned the Patriarch of Alexandria to determine the date of Easter every year and announce it to the other churches in the form of a Paschal Letter. Pope Theophilus and Pope Cyril the Great, known as the Pillar of Faith, were indispensable in the following two Councils at Constantinople (AD 381) and Ephesus (AD 431).

C. Monasticism

Monasticism in all its forms, mainly anchoritic and coenobitic, was founded in Egypt by Abba Anthony and Abba Pachomius respectively. Other pillars of monasticism from the Coptic Church include Abba Paul the first hermit, Abba Macarius, Abba Shenute, and Abba Ammon. Many

In 1893, Pope Cyril V reopened the Theological College to continue the illustrious theological work of the School of Alexandria. It now has 7 branches in Egypt and 5 abroad. To cultivate the rich heritage of the church, an Institute for Coptic Studies was established in 1954. The Institute